

God in Relation to Decrees, Foreknowledge, Election and Predestination

CALVINISM

Founded circa 1560 by lawyer-reformer John Calvin, under the influence of *later* writings of St. Augustine. Foundational to Reformed Church tradition.

Adherents: Martin Luther, George Whitefield, J. I. Packer, R.C. Sproul

Summary of Beliefs: God decreed all things that come to pass and foreknows all things as fixed and certain from all eternity. "God hath elected some and rejected other some and the cause is nowhere else to be sought for than in His purpose." [i.e.—He has determined to save some and reject others.]

Tenets:

Total inability/depravity of men
(All are lost.)

Unconditional election/selection
(not based on merit)

Limited atonement

(Christ died for *some*—the elect, only.)

Irresistible grace

(can't refuse salvation, if one of elect)

Perseverance of the saints

Problems:

- God seems rigid, authoritarian, unchanging; people are merely spectators or automatons with no real responsibility.
- If God predestined all that happened, is He not also the author of sin (i.e.—He *planned* the fall)?
- Why should we be judged for being the way He made us?
- If He chooses to save some but not all, how can God be impartial?

Key verses—Those depicting control by the will of God:

Isaiah 46:8-11

John 6:37-40 & 15:16

Acts 4:27-28 & 13:48

Romans 9:6-26

Galatians 1:15

Ephesians 1:3-11

II Thessalonians 2:13-14

ALTERNATIVE

Founded circa 1520 by Desiderius Erasmus, a Dutch priest who wrote revised Latin and the 1st Western Greek translations of the New Testament. He influenced Zwingli and Luther, who differed with him on the issue of free will. Ideas later developed by L.D. McCabe.

Beliefs: Some, but not all events are predestined by God. Our choices are truly creative acts—before made, they do not exist, except as possibilities; once made, they are actualities. God knows everything, both possible and actual. There exists, therefore, a framework of what *must* happen within the limits of what *may* happen to fulfill God's plan.

Tenets:

- 1) God wishes *all* to be saved.
- 2) Salvation is initiated by God, then we respond to grace.
- 3) God elects to save those who respond, predestining them to adoption, conforming to Christ's image and receiving an inheritance.
- 4) Distinction between the grounds and conditions of salvation.

Problems:

- God seems limited in knowledge and foresight to allow for man's free will.
- If God can change His mind, how can we say He Himself does not change?

Key verses—Those depicting an open future with both free will of man *and* providential control:

Genesis 1:31 & 6:5-7

Exodus 32:7-14

Deuteronomy 8:2

I Samuel 15:11 & 35

II Kings 20:1-6

Isaiah 5:1-7

Jeremiah 18:7-10 & 26:3

Jonah 3:10-4:2

Matthew 13:10-17

Luke 7:30

Acts 28:23-27

Romans 2:4-16

ARMINIANISM

Founded circa 1600 by Dutch professor, Jacobus Arminius (as influenced by *early* writings of St. Augustine and other early church ideas), in reaction to severe Calvinism being used as control mechanism by monarchists in his country. Foundational for Methodist, Baptist and other evangelical churches.

Adherents: John Wesley, C.S. Lewis

Beliefs: Everything that will ever happen is foreknown as a certainty from all eternity, but not in every detail predestined by God. "The decree to save and damn certain particular persons has its foundation in the foreknowledge of God, as to who would and would not believe and persevere." [i.e.—God has determined to save those He foresees will accept and obey Him.]

Tenets:

- 1) Man cannot of himself exercise saving faith.
- 2) Conditional election (Those who will respond are saved.)
- 3) Atonement for all (though not all receive the gift)
- 4) Grace is resistible.
- 5) Possibility of falling away and "losing salvation"

Problems:

- Man seems to be in control, with God as a spectator, seeming rather permissive, impotent, or co-dependent in nature.
- If all is certain to God, how can there be free will?
- Is God's conduct determined by man's response? If so, how can He be sovereign?

Key verses—Those depicting man's freedom of choice and God's foreknowledge:

Psalms 139:16

Isaiah 46:10

Matthew 23:37

John 1:12, 6:65 & 13:18

Acts 2:23-24

Romans 8:29-30

I Peter 1:1-2 & 20-23